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# **Bulgaria: Coping With the Papal Assassination Scandal**



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**An Intelligence Assessment**

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*EUR 84-10251C*

*December 1984*

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# Bulgaria: Coping With the Papal Assassination Scandal

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An Intelligence Assessment

This paper was prepared by [redacted]  
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the Directorate of Operations [redacted]

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EUR, [redacted]

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**Bulgaria:  
Coping With the  
Papal Assassination Scandal**

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**Key Judgments**

*Information available  
as of 15 November 1984  
was used in this report.*

Bulgaria has been trying hard to minimize damage from Italian allegations of its complicity in the 1981 papal assassination attempt. To prevent further tarnishing of its already poor international image, now that indictments have been handed down against three Bulgarian officials, Sofia plans a strong legal defense and a propaganda campaign blaming the United States for creating the scandal. At the same time, the regime may also make limited new gestures to improve its image in the West. Even if the trial affirms Bulgarian complicity, Sofia probably expects to weather the ensuing, short-lived international condemnation. We suspect, however, the scandal will contribute to debates at home about the costs of maintaining Bulgaria's reputation as a blindly loyal Soviet surrogate—at a time when Moscow is already having trouble enforcing unity and discipline in Eastern Europe.

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The case initially threatened Bulgaria's efforts to expand international ties, complicated its relations with the USSR, and focused attention on its other illegal activities, such as narcotics smuggling:

- After the arrest of Sergey Antonov in Rome in November 1982, Italy recalled its Ambassador, and several other Western governments were reluctant to pursue high-level political contacts with Bulgaria.

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As the investigation dragged on, however, tensions with European countries over the assassination attempt eased, Italy and Bulgaria returned their respective ambassadors, and most Western governments resumed active contacts with Sofia pending the outcome of the trial.

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Sofia's current strategy is to highlight any contradictions in Agca's testimony, blame the United States for creating an "anti-Bulgarian campaign," and prepare a strong legal defense in anticipation of a trial. As the Italian trial approaches, we expect Bulgaria to be more assertive in arguing its case in a variety of forums and to rely more on active measures against Italy and the United States to establish a case for Bulgarian innocence. Sofia may also be prepared to make token gestures toward cooperation on issues such as international terrorism or narcotics smuggling to foster good will in the West.

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In the worst case for Bulgaria—conviction of Antonov based on evidence corroborating Agca's claims or the revelation of sensitive intelligence matters by Antonov—Sofia is likely to remain adamant in protesting its innocence in hopes that the criticism will pass without coordinated Western sanctions. The regime would most likely concentrate its displeasure on the United States. In our opinion, Bulgaria would continue, however, to cultivate other Western countries such as Japan and West Germany that are important to its overall economic strategy. If the United States and other Western countries tried to isolate Bulgaria, we believe Sofia would try to exploit any divisions in the West over the imposition of sanctions and seek Soviet economic assistance to compensate for any losses in Western trade.

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Whatever the outcome of the trial, the scandal is likely to sharpen divisions within the Bulgarian leadership between conservatives and moderates as they maneuver between the pursuit of national interests and the reality of Soviet dominance. Hardliners will argue that the West's "anti-Bulgarian campaign" illustrates the need for even greater vigilance and closer ties with the Bloc. Pragmatic nationalist elements, however, may question whether the benefits of subservience to Moscow are worth the costs of estrangement from the West. Although there are clear limitations on Bulgaria's autonomy from the USSR, there is sufficient room for maneuver to allow for a debate between hardliners and moderates as they prepare for Zhivkov's eventual departure.

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**Chronology of Key Events****1979***1 February Mehmet Ali Agca assassinates Turkish journalist Abdi Ipekci.* [ ] 25X1*June Agca arrested and imprisoned for Ipekci assassination.* [ ] 25X1*25 November Agca escapes from Turkish prison and two days later sends letter to Turkish newspaper threatening to kill the Pope during 28-30 November trip to Turkey.* [ ] 25X1**1980***Mid-July-31 August Agca in Bulgaria.* [ ] 25X1**1981***13 May Agca shoots Pope John Paul II in Rome.* [ ] 25X1*July Agca tried, convicted, and sentenced to life imprisonment in Italy.* [ ] 25X1**1982***May Agca begins to provide information implicating others in the plot to kill the Pope.* [ ] 25X1*25 November Bulgarian airline official Sergey Antonov arrested by Italian police based on statements from Agca. Subsequently, arrest warrants issued for two Bulgarian diplomats—Todor Ayvasov and Zhelyo Vasilov—who had returned to Bulgaria.* [ ] 25X1*1 December Bulgarian press blames CIA for anti-Bulgarian campaign, and Bulgarian officials host press conference for foreign journalists.* [ ] 25X1*Mid-December Bulgarian and Italian ambassadors called home for consultations.* [ ] 25X1*17 December Bulgarians host second press conference in Sofia.* [ ] 25X1**1984***April Bulgaria and Italy return new ambassadors.* [ ] 25X1*June The secret Italian prosecutor's report recommending trial for three Bulgarians and six Turks is leaked to Western press.* [ ] 25X1*26 October Investigating Magistrate Martella officially indicts the three Bulgarians and four Turks.* [ ] 25X1

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*Mehmet Ali Agca shoots Pope John Paul II on 13 May 1981 at St. Peter's Square in Rome.*



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## Bulgaria: Coping With the Papal Assassination Scandal

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### Introduction

Bulgaria has been struggling for two years with the fallout from its alleged complicity in the 1981 papal assassination attempt, and it now faces renewed negative publicity as the trial date approaches. In November 1982 Italian authorities in Rome arrested the Balkan Airline manager, Sergey Antonov, after the papal assailant, Mehmet Ali Agca, identified him as one of several coconspirators in the attempt to take the life of Pope John Paul II. After a three-year investigation into allegations of an international conspiracy in the attack, investigating Magistrate Ilario Martella in late October 1984 formally indicted Antonov, two other Bulgarian officials currently in Sofia, and four Turks. The trial probably will begin sometime in 1985.



*Sergey Ivanov Antonov*

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This Intelligence Assessment analyzes how Sofia has coped with allegations about its involvement in the assassination attempt and considers how it plans to contain any future damage resulting from the scandal. It also assesses some of the longer term implications for Bulgaria for its relations with the East and West and its involvement in other illicit activities, such as arms and narcotics smuggling and foreign intelligence operations. This paper does not treat the ultimate question of Bulgaria's guilt or innocence in the affair and does not weigh the voluminous and frequently contradictory information concerning this controversial case. This paper therefore focuses on Bulgarian and—to some extent—Soviet policy reactions to the affair, on the key elements of Sofia's defense strategy, and on the broader policy implications of the scandal for Bulgaria.

waning Soviet economic support.<sup>1</sup> The ensuing international publicity further tarnished Bulgaria's already unsavory image and drew attention to its links to some terrorist groups and to arms and narcotics smuggling. Many journalists, for example, also cited the bizarre 1978 murder of emigre dissident Georgi Markov in London as corroborating evidence of the heavyhanded tactics used by the Bulgarian Intelligence Service (Durzhavna Sigurnost (DS)).

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### Skirting Diplomatic Isolation

The arrest of Sergey Antonov seriously embarrassed the Zhivkov regime and threatened to undermine Bulgaria's push for improved relations with the West—a strategy intended in large part to offset

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*The "Turkish Mafia" Nexus*

Mehmet Ali Agca, having escaped from a Turkish prison in 1979, spent six weeks in Sofia during the summer of 1980 in the company of Turkish smugglers known to be in collusion with Bulgarian intelligence officials. It was apparently Agca's contacts with these underworld figures in Turkey that brought him to Sofia and ultimately led to the Italian allegations linking Bulgaria to the papal attack. Sofia, for all its propaganda assaults on Agca as a credible witness, has not satisfactorily answered Western accusations based on this fact. For the most part, Bulgaria tries to ignore it or deny they knew Agca's true identity while he was in Sofia. [redacted]

Since at least the 1960s, the Bulgarian Intelligence Service (DS) has provided a safehaven and assistance to an international smuggling network dominated by the Turkish underworld. Some arms and narcotics traffickers openly settled in Sofia, while others freely transited Bulgaria to conduct business through their Sofia-based intermediaries. Because the DS maintains extensive surveillance throughout the country, we are confident high-level Bulgarian officials knew this network was at work. [redacted]

[redacted] the Bulgarian foreign trade organization, "Kintex," coordinates the smuggling activities to earn hard currency. Kintex, [redacted] also brokers arms deals and acquires embargoed technology in the West. [redacted]



The Bulgarian Foreign Trade Organization "Kintex" is headquartered in Sofia [redacted]

There is evidence that the Bulgarians have tightened controls over the smuggling community over the past year, but we do not believe that the regime has eliminated the profitable smuggling operation altogether. According to [redacted] US Embassy contacts, there was a noticeable crackdown in Bulgarian smuggling activities as a result of the international publicity and Soviet criticism in the wake of Agca's revelations. Bulgarian authorities ordered at least some of the traffickers out of Sofia to more remote locations, in some cases outside Bulgaria. [redacted]

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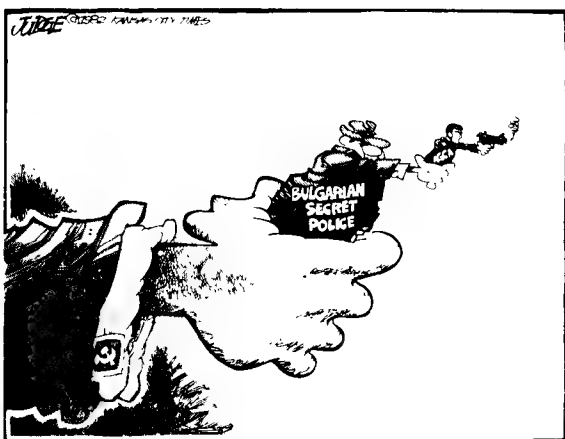
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*Agca's allegations immediately became an international cause celebre, reinforcing Bulgaria's reputation as a Soviet puppet willing to carry out Moscow's destabilizing activities.* [redacted]

These disclosures temporarily set back Sofia's foreign policy objectives by:

- Reinforcing the Western perception of Bulgaria as a Soviet puppet willing to engage indiscriminately in efforts to destabilize democratic governments.
- Undermining Sofia's efforts to portray itself as a pragmatic, cooperative economic partner—much as the Kadar regime in Hungary.
- Making the leaders of some Third World countries, particularly those with large Catholic populations, more suspicious that subversive intentions dominate Bulgaria's political and economic initiatives.<sup>2</sup> [redacted]

Initially most Western governments reacted by resisting Bulgarian overtures for high-level political exchanges. The scandal badly strained relations with Italy, and both countries immediately recalled their ambassadors after Antonov's arrest. Major Western countries also responded coolly to Bulgarian requests for political dialogue, acting out of loyalty to Italy or a desire to postpone potentially embarrassing contacts with Sofia until the case was resolved. In addition, the European Parliament passed a resolution in January 1983 expressing concern at Bulgaria's alleged involvement in the attempted assassination and urging closer cooperation against terrorism. [redacted]

<sup>2</sup> In Colombia, for example, press coverage of a Bulgarian trade delegation in early 1983 focused largely on the scandal, and a journalist for the most influential newspaper pointedly asked why the Bulgarians wanted to assassinate the Pope. [redacted]

Despite the initial burst of bad publicity, diplomatic setbacks, and potential economic threats, Bulgaria to date has not experienced any durable sanctions imposed as a result of the papal affair. As the Italian investigation progressed, West European governments gradually resumed a relations-as-usual attitude toward Bulgaria. Most refrained from official comments or actions on the case pending the findings of Italy's judicial proceedings. Beyond this circumspect approach, we also suspect that Western leaders view the case as a messy and unwelcome complication in already strained East-West relations. We believe key West European governments, such as West Germany and France, are eager to encourage Bulgaria to tilt toward the West, and they welcome opportunities for expanded economic ties. [redacted]

A series of conciliatory gestures in Bulgarian-Italian relations over the past year—including papal audiences with Bulgarian cultural delegations and the exchange of new Bulgarian and Italian ambassadors to their respective posts in April 1984—also have encouraged other Western governments to resume active contacts with Bulgaria. [redacted]

[redacted] despite the unresolved Italian charges against Bulgaria, Chancellor Helmut Kohl was planning to host Bulgarian General Secretary Todor Zhivkov in Bonn last September until Moscow—in the view of the US Embassy—forced a postponement of the visit. Austrian Chancellor Sinowatz did visit Bulgaria in September. In early 1985 Zhivkov is scheduled to visit Japan, and, according to French Embassy officials in Sofia, President Mitterrand has accepted an invitation to visit the Bulgarian capital. [redacted]

Frequent high-level political and economic exchanges with Third World countries suggest Bulgaria has not suffered significant setbacks in this area. The level of commercial activities—especially arms sales and construction projects—continues to rise, particularly in the Middle East and Africa. Bulgaria's major Third World trading partners—Libya, Iraq, and Iran maintain a high demand for arms and, in any case, [redacted]

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are not likely to be concerned about Bulgarian guilt or innocence in the papal assassination attempt. Trade with the Third World is important to Sofia's overall economic strategy as a source of hard currency to finance Western technology imports and an alternative source of energy and raw materials. [REDACTED]

Sofia also has taken pains to make sure that Bulgarian officials abroad hew to the "official line" on the case. [REDACTED]

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### **The Bulgarian Response**

Bulgaria immediately responded to the Italian allegations with sharp denials and diplomatic protests, and Sofia put its massive propaganda machine into high gear at home and abroad to profess its innocence. Bulgaria's defensive strategy has been to maintain consistently that Agca is lying about his alleged contacts with Bulgarian officials, and that he was "fed" information about them as part of a US-led campaign to destabilize Bulgaria and socialism. [REDACTED]

From the outset, Bulgaria stridently denied any connection to Agca's attempt against the Pope and, by asserting numerous inconsistencies in Agca's story, has attacked his credibility as the sole witness against them. With this goal in mind, Sofia's unrelenting propaganda has tried to prove that the "Bulgarian connection" is part of a US-inspired campaign against Communism. Sofia's "offensive defense" has included:

- A flood of newspaper articles, pamphlets, and books that declare Antonov's innocence.
- Mobilization of Bulgarian officials abroad to discredit the allegations in their contacts with foreigners.
- Two carefully managed press conferences in Sofia in December 1982 where Western journalists were allowed to question some of Agca's alleged accomplices who are not likely to return for the trial in Rome.<sup>3</sup>
- Cooperation with the Italian investigation by hosting investigating Magistrate Martella in June 1983 and allowing him to interview key witnesses. [REDACTED]

<sup>3</sup> These included Antonov's wife, the two Bulgarian diplomats Todor Ayvazov and Zhelyo Vasilev, and Turkish smuggling magnate --and Agca's alleged paymaster-- Bekir Celenk. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] In addition to influencing Western opinion, we believe that the Bulgarian leadership was also extremely concerned that some of its diplomats stationed abroad might wonder about Bulgarian involvement in the affair. [REDACTED]

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Sofia also has lobbied its case in meetings with Western officials and politicians. On several occasions Bulgarian officials have argued their innocence with their US counterparts and stressed that bilateral relations could improve if the United States used its influence to pressure Italy to drop the case. [REDACTED]

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While Sofia's propaganda barrage, in our view, did little by itself to convince most Western observers of Bulgaria's innocence, many of the points raised by the Bulgarians found resonance in a variety of Western publications. On some points the Western press identified weaknesses in the case even before the Bulgarian press. We have no evidence of Bulgarian collusion in planting these articles, but it cannot be ruled out, especially since Sofia has cited several Western articles in its own press to bolster its position. [REDACTED]

The Bulgarian regime also has tried to avoid any new embarrassments by reducing—but not eliminating—its active involvement in other sensitive operations.

This prudence, however, has not extended to Bulgaria's aggressive approach to illicit acquisitions of COCOM-embargoed technology or to its smuggling activities altogether. The arrest in September 1983 of a Bulgarian trade representative in the United States, the expulsion of a Bulgarian official in Japan—both for espionage—and the seizure last May by Greek officials of a secret arms shipment from Bulgaria indicate that Sofia is still very active in such operations. [REDACTED]

Bulgaria also has continued overt support for Soviet international policies and may even be adopting a larger role in politically sensitive areas as part of the role assigned Bulgaria in the Warsaw Pact:

- Sofia's arms sales in the Third World are up sharply, including six major shipments to Nicaragua since 1982.<sup>4</sup> Bulgarian officials have stated that they will not discontinue this policy because it represents legitimate government-to-government arms sales.

- Bulgaria has hosted an array of radical Palestinian leaders in support of Soviet policies in the Middle East (for example, George Habbash of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—PFLP) and maintains friendly relations with Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, all known supporters of international terrorism.

Thus, Sofia's concern with restoring its image to date has not induced it to make any significant foreign policy adjustments in order to mollify Western critics. [REDACTED]

### Soviet Support and Criticism

Immediately after Antonov's arrest, Moscow took an active hand in assisting Sofia. In December 1982 the Soviet Charge in Rome officially threatened to freeze high-level bilateral contacts if the Italian campaign continued. At the same time, the Soviet Charge in Washington delivered an unusually harsh protest, charging that the allegations were part of a slanderous US campaign against Bulgaria and the USSR. According to the US Embassy in Paris, Moscow apparently also enlisted the support of the French Communist Party to offset the negative international publicity. In separate but coordinated attacks in late 1982, the French Communist Party and the Soviet Embassy in Paris harshly criticized the French media for "slandering" the USSR and its allies. [REDACTED]

The KGB apparently also used active measures to help its ally. For example, in mid-1983 a leftwing Italian magazine published two forged US Embassy cables—similar in pattern to other KGB forgeries. They alleged that a US "operation" existed even before Antonov's arrest to link the Bulgarians to the papal attack. [REDACTED]

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While Moscow was publicly defending "Bulgaria's honor," however, there were hints that the scandal may have created new strains in Bulgarian-Soviet relations:

- Zhivkov's first meeting with Yuriy Andropov as the new General Secretary at the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the USSR in Moscow in December 1982—a month after Antonov's arrest—drew considerably lower billing in the Soviet media than those of other East European leaders on the same day.<sup>5</sup> While Andropov may simply have wanted to convey this message in light of global headlines about Bulgaria's role, the snub was no less real to the Bulgarians.
- Eight months after that apparent snub, Zhivkov implied to the US Ambassador in Sofia that Western allegations of Bulgarian complicity in the papal attack had complicated his relations with the new Soviet leader.

Andropov probably was especially sensitive on this point because he had been head of the KGB at the time of the attack, and was directly implicated in press speculation as the prime sponsor of the assassination attempt. The massive publicity surrounding Antonov's arrest roughly coincided with Andropov's election to General Secretary. Moreover, given his intelligence experience, Andropov probably had little tolerance for the slipshod security procedures—especially regarding the Turkish mafia—that put Bulgaria in the international spotlight.

Soviet diplomatic pressure in support of Bulgaria appeared to decline somewhat as the international publicity waned. In addition, Moscow's other international priorities, in some instances, apparently prevented the USSR from giving Bulgaria as much support as it wanted. Sofia reportedly appealed to Moscow in the spring of 1984 to use its influence to press Rome to resolve the Antonov affair. Moscow,

<sup>6</sup> *Pravda* gave front page coverage to Andropov's meeting with the leaders from Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Bulgaria. While the names of the other three leaders were featured prominently in the headline, Zhivkov's was conspicuously absent. In addition, the Soviet army newspaper used noticeably smaller print for the Bulgarian headline. As Dean of the Warsaw Pact and a loyal Soviet ally, Zhivkov should have received at least equal treatment. We view the press coverage as a deliberate slight by the protocol conscious Soviet press.



*International media speculation directly implicated the then new Soviet General Secretary Yuriy Andropov as the ultimate sponsor of the attack, adding new strains to Bulgarian-Soviet relations.*

although sympathetic, was reportedly reluctant to become overly involved because it assigned higher priority to getting Prime Minister Craxi to break the NATO consensus on INF deployment. Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko did raise the issue with Italian Foreign Minister Andreotti during the latter's visit to Moscow last spring. Gromyko apparently applied relatively low-key pressure and repeated charges that the accusations were baseless and should be dropped. There is no firm evidence that the Bulgarians took serious umbrage at the extent of Soviet support, but we suspect that some Bulgarian officials privately believed Moscow should have adopted a more active role in pressuring the Italians.

Any friction over the fallout from the Papal assassination issue and priorities and tactics to deal with it has added to the broader strains in Soviet-Bulgarian relations, which have become increasingly evident in the past year.

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Moscow's decision to force Zhivkov to postpone his visit to Bonn a few days later—part of an overall tougher Soviet line on high-level East European contacts with West Germany—undoubtedly aggravated Zhivkov's frustration. We believe he placed high personal importance on the trip, calculating that a meeting with a major Western leader would help refurbish his regime's tarnished international image.

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process, especially as Rome has already proved unresponsive to their efforts to halt the trial. Since September the Bulgarians have taken a number of new initiatives:

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### Pretrial Concerns and Strategy

Now that the Italian magistrate has confirmed that the case will go to trial, Sofia appears to be preparing a comprehensive legal defense and an intensified propaganda blitz to attack Agca's credibility. In its propaganda campaign, Bulgaria has stressed the following:

- Allegations that US officials, identified in the Bulgarian press by name in several cases, were directly involved in creating the anti-Bulgarian campaign.
- The contradictions, retractions, and inconsistencies in Agca's testimony.
- Failure by Italian authorities to keep Agca in isolation which, Sofia argues, allowed him to be "coached" in his testimony.
- Compromises of the judicial process due to leaks of the prosecutor's secret report to the press. [redacted]

- Two books were published by a French lawyer and a Greek journalist supporting Bulgarian innocence and blaming the case on the West. We believe Sofia had an active hand in these publications to give the impression of international support.

- According to the Bulgarian press, an October 1984 conference of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers in Athens agreed to organize an international commission to investigate the Antonov case—no doubt at Sofia's behest. [redacted]

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In addition to undermining Agca's credibility, the Bulgarian defense probably will concentrate sharply on "proving" its contention that Agca was "coached" by Italian Intelligence officials. Sofia, for example, has challenged Agca's claim that he learned some details about Antonov's apartment from the press. In its own press Sofia argues the Italian media did not report such information until after Agca disclosed it to Italian investigators. Sofia maintains this is the "Achilles heel" of the Italian case and will undoubtedly attempt to show that Agca is not only a liar but that he could only have obtained this information through coaching. [redacted]

In this pretrial period, Sofia probably is also counting on Soviet support. Because the USSR is closely linked to the accusations against Bulgaria, Moscow probably will closely monitor the planning and execution of Bulgarian defensive tactics, provide support through private diplomatic channels, and continue the propaganda campaign. At the same time, however, Bulgaria's concern over the case is more acute, and potential differences with Moscow over how to handle the trial and the international attention it will draw may further strain bilateral relations—especially if Moscow's other international priorities prevent it from meeting Bulgarian requests. For example, Moscow's recently expressed interest in improving East-West ties may conflict with Sofia's desire for strong Soviet public and diplomatic support. [redacted]

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Bulgaria is also intensifying propaganda and diplomatic pressure on Italy to drop the case against Antonov. We suspect that the Bulgarians are frustrated about their inability to influence the Italian legal

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Another aspect of Sofia's strategy is the preparation of its own "countertrial" of Agca for slander against Bulgaria and its citizens. These quasi-legal proceedings would publicize Sofia's defense and attempt to counter the expected resurgence of negative publicity prior to and during the trial.

perhaps reveal new, embarrassing information. Its leaders undoubtedly feel particularly vulnerable because the Italian judicial process could convict Antonov based solely on Agca's testimony. In addition, they are worried that Antonov might not stand up well to the stress of the trial.

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some Bulgarian officials feared that Antonov might be persuaded to confess to "trumped up" charges. The effects of two years in custody, the drain of a long and uncertain trial, an impending divorce, and poor career prospects in Bulgaria—even if released—make Antonov an especially vulnerable defendant.

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We have also detected signs of nervousness in Bulgaria that Antonov's revelations of his other activities as an intelligence officer might cause a new scandal.

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Sofia is making inquiries that might give the Bulgarian countertrial and its defense in Rome a gloss of international participation. Bulgaria has asked for assistance from the United Kingdom, West Germany, France, Turkey, and Austria in interviewing persons that Agca has identified as associates. Sofia's precise expectations in these requests are murky but it apparently hopes it can gain some useful information to be used to discredit Agca, and—if it is denied access to witnesses—it can claim the West refused to cooperate.<sup>7</sup>

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Sofia undoubtedly fears he might be inclined to trade information for clemency. Guilty or innocent, Antonov might even confess.

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While Bulgarian officials are optimistic that the evidence established so far will not prove Antonov guilty, Sofia is extremely worried over the numerous uncertainties associated with the possible fallout from the trial. Sofia probably is deeply concerned that the judicial process will take a longer time than projected, bring more bad publicity, and

### Outlook: The Trial and Its Aftermath

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From now until the end of the trial, we believe Sofia will be more assertive behind the scenes than at any time since Antonov's arrest. Within its limited ability to influence developments, it will use a mixture of diplomatic pressure, disinformation, and conciliatory gestures to shape developments in Rome and influence world public opinion.

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<sup>7</sup> In one strange approach, Sofia requested that London grant Bulgarian investigators an interview with Vladimir Kuzichkin—a KGB officer who defected to the United Kingdom in 1982—according to British diplomats in Sofia. Agca told Bulgarian investigators in Rome in 1983 that in Iran in 1979-80 Kuzichkin put him in contact with Bulgarian intelligence officials to plan the assassination. London has informed Sofia that Kuzichkin denied any knowledge of the assassination attempt or meeting Agca and that he would not meet with the Bulgarians. Bulgarian officials have since used Kuzichkin's assertion that he never met Agca to further weaken Agca's credibility.

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[redacted] Sofia's current vulnerability over the Antonov affair might also induce it to make unexpected gestures of cooperation in areas of special concern to the West. The regime, for example, could share sensitive information with Western governments on narcotics smugglers or some terrorist activities. Such gestures would be crafted for maximum propaganda value, and verification would be a key problem for the West. Sofia would have to ensure that it did not make gestures that conflict with overall Soviet objectives. Within its limited maneuvering room, Sofia's need to improve its image could serve Western interests.<sup>8</sup> In our view, however, it can not go so far as to alter the basic thrust of its pro-Soviet foreign policy. [redacted]

At the trial itself, we believe Sofia might react to various possible outcomes in the following ways:

- *If, in the outcome most preferred by Bulgaria, Antonov is acquitted*, Sofia would quickly and firmly press Italy officially to terminate the case lest loose ends perpetuate the scandal. We would also expect a strong blast at the United States, with Sofia reaffirming that the United States was the main instigator behind the scandal. The anti-US rhetoric, however, probably would ease relatively soon because Bulgaria's interests would better be served by resuming normal diplomatic relations and especially its pursuit of expanded economic relations with the United States. [redacted]
- *If the court convicts Antonov based solely on Agca's largely uncorroborated testimony*, Sofia probably would begin a lengthy appeals process, increase diplomatic pressure on Italy, and continue its propaganda efforts. In addition to the probable staging of a "countertrial," we would expect the Bulgarians to:
  - Argue that the West should maintain relations on a normal basis pending decisions on its appeal.
  - Seek Soviet pressure on those Western governments most concerned about East-West tensions. [redacted]

<sup>8</sup> For example, in 1978 Zhivkov extradited four Baader Meinhof terrorists to West Germany in a move designed to improve bilateral ties. [redacted]

We believe that Bulgaria would expect such offensive measures to increase Western divisions on the case and Sofia, with Soviet help, probably would try to isolate the United States from others in the West by placing Washington at the center of a deliberate "anti-Bulgarian provocation." [redacted]

- *If the court convicts Antonov based on decisive new documentary evidence or testimony of surprise witnesses*, we would expect considerably sharper reprisals from Sofia, including:

- Breaking diplomatic relations with Rome and reducing diplomatic contacts with Washington.
- Asking Moscow to apply concerted pressure abroad to raise the case as a major, US-instigated effort to destroy East-West relations.

Sofia would be extremely concerned that the United States would urge coordinated Western trade sanctions against Bulgaria and would intensify efforts to cultivate important Western partners—like Japan and West Germany. [redacted]

### Domestic Implications

The papal assassination scandal is unlikely to have much impact on the normally passive, non-Catholic Bulgarian population and will not weaken the regime's grip on the instruments of power. At the same time, we believe that it will deepen cynicism about Bulgaria's subservience to the USSR and undermine the legitimacy of the party leadership. [redacted]

The secretive, conspiratorial nature of the system in Bulgaria assures that only a few officials would know if Sofia did actually have a role in the assassination attempt. The rest, we believe, may calculate that either Bulgaria:

- May have had a role, but only because Moscow ordered the operation for its own separate reasons.
- Had no role, but its unfailing loyalty to Moscow buttressed the general assumption of its guilt.
- Was simply a pawn of the Soviets who directed Agca, perhaps even using Bulgarian agents or assets without informing Sofia. [redacted]

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The cumulative impact of the scandal may provide additional ammunition to those in the leadership who already question the costs of unswerving loyalty to the USSR. If so, the incident could add to existing strains between pragmatists, who advocate economic reform and closer ties to the West, and old-guard pro-Soviets as they prepare for the succession struggle to the 73-year-old Zhivkov. [ ]

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The traditional pro-Soviet forces in the leadership—epitomized by Prime Minister Grisha Filipov—are likely to argue that the scandal proves that Sofia should not gamble on cooperation with a basically hostile West. They are likely to press for even closer Bloc integration, loyalty to Moscow, and resistance to Western influence, while using the regime's anti-US propaganda as a lever to seek favor in Moscow and to compromise the pragmatist program at home. These forces would use the possible isolation of Bulgaria and Western economic sanctions to bolster its argument.

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Pragmatists—like the younger technocrats exemplified by Ognyan Doynov—might argue that Bulgaria needs closer ties with the West and reduced economic dependence on the USSR in order to improve economic growth prospects. Some may press to reassess and reduce activities that are most offensive to the West and bring little long-term benefit to Bulgaria—like arms deliveries to Nicaragua. This debate will influence the balance of power between the conservatives and pragmatists as individual leaders try to strengthen their own positions and policies in preparation for Zhivkov's eventual departure. [ ]

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Zhivkov may personally endorse continued efforts to expand ties with the West—including the United States—and may grow more impatient with the demands of his subservient role in Moscow. At the same time, he is not likely to challenge the USSR directly. We think that his heirs, however, will eventually strike their own balance between the costs and benefits of close ties to Moscow. The next generation is likely to be more aware than its predecessors of the costs and less appreciative of what Soviet support has meant in the past. As a result of experiences like the papal assassination scandal, they may be inclined to carve a more autonomous, international niche for their country, one that could from time to time conflict with Soviet priorities. [ ]

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